

Side Ways

Steakhouses are upping the ante with mouthwatering side dishes.

By Katie Ayoub

Menu distinction is important to all restaurants, but steakhouses have a tough time carving out a niche. Certainly, not all steaks are created equal. Indeed, many chefs concentrate their efforts on wowing with their meats—Kobe-style, dry-aged, wet-aged. It would be flippant to say that fabulous steaks are a dime a dozen, but among top chophouses, they are the expectation. And those steaks may be

memorable, but chefs we spoke to say the buzz that reverberates within their diners' psyche is generated by delicious, unexpected and signature side dishes.

These chefs give the sides menu due attention, and think outside the baked potato. They use sides to showcase the kitchen's talent and the season's produce. But they're careful to point out that the innovative sides shouldn't steal the whole sideshow. Again, expectations play a big role in steakhouses, and a side of garlic mashed potatoes is home on the range

here. But, there's a growing expectation for a side of lobster mashed potatoes, too.

Potato sides

"I believe that having traditional items like creamed corn and creamed spinach are important on a steakhouse menu," says Barry Dakake, executive chef of N9NE Steak House (part of N9NE Group) in Las Vegas. "But, you also need items on your menu that stand out and make people want to come back."

Dakake's lobster mash is just such a dish. "It's so rich and decadent, and people just can't get enough," he says. He runs peeled and boiled Yukon gold potatoes through a giant hand ricer, then adds whole butter, heavy cream, salt and pepper. They're held in a bain-marie until service. Once ordered, he naps the potatoes with a lobster sauce made of roasted, crushed lobster bodies, mirepoix, lobster stock and tomato. The sauce is thickened with white rice and strained several times, and then finished with beautiful chunks of lobster.

At LarkCreekSteak in San Francisco (part of Bradley Ogden's Lark Creek Restaurant Group), chef John Ledbetter can't take the

Duck fat gives added depth of flavor to this trio of fries served at StripSteak in Las Vegas.



Karl Petzke

potato pancakes off the menu. "They're so popular, we just can't do it," he says.

What makes them a standout is the accompanying Fuji apple compote and crème fraîche. "They add that sweet and sour element, and just bring the dish up a level," says Ledbetter.

Las Vegas-based StripSteak's trio of duck-fat french fries is a study in menu distinction. Executive chef Ben Jenkins portions three servings of fries cooked in duck fat and canola oil. Each is dusted with a different house seasoning: smoked paprika/mustard; truffle oil/chives; and rosemary/onion. For wow factor, dipping

sauses (smoked paprika/mustard crème fraîche; truffle aioli; and onion ketchup) are paired with each seasoned bowl of fries.

"We wanted to offer something familiar, but with a lot more going on," says Jenkins. "They're hugely popular, and we also serve them as an amuse."

Trio of Duck Fat Fries

Ben Jenkins, Executive Chef
StripSteak
Las Vegas

Yield: 4 servings

2 lbs. Kennebec potatoes (or russet)
Duck fat, as needed for frying
Canola or peanut oil, as needed for frying
Kosher salt, to taste
Seasonings (recipes follow)
Dipping sauses (recipes follow)

Method: Scrub potatoes well. Cut 1/4-inch-thick fries on mandoline. Hold fries in bowl of cold water. Fill fryer with a 50/50 combination of duck fat and canola or peanut oil; heat to 275°F. Remove fries from water; drain thoroughly on paper towels. Cook in oil for 5 minutes, or until edges begin to brown. Remove fries from oil; drain on cooling racks set over cookie trays. (Fries can be frozen at this stage, which will result in crisper product.) Turn fryer temperature up to 375°F. Fry potatoes a second time until crisp and golden brown. Remove from fat; drain briefly. Portion into 3 bowls. Season with kosher

salt. Finish with seasonings. Serve with trio of dipping sauses.

Seasonings

Smoked Paprika and Mustard Fries:

1 T. smoked Spanish paprika
1 t. dry mustard powder
Salt, to taste
Toss 1 bowl of fries with ingredients.
Serve with Smoked Paprika and Mustard Crème Fraîche.

Truffle Fries:

1 t. truffle oil
1 t. chopped chives
Toss fries with ingredients. Serve with Truffle Aioli.

Rosemary/Onion Fries:

1 white onion, rough chop
Pinch salt
1 t. fresh rosemary, chopped finely
1 T. fresh parsley, chopped finely
Process onion and salt in food processor until smooth. Layer colander with cheese-cloth; suspend over bowl. Drain onion purée in colander for 1 hour, rendering 1/4

cup onion juice. Toss fries with 1 T. onion juice; reserve remaining juice. Toss in herbs; serve with Onion Ketchup.

Dipping Sauses

Smoked Paprika/ Mustard Crème Fraîche

1 cup crème fraîche
1 T. smoked Spanish paprika
2 T. whole-grain mustard
Salt and pepper to taste
Stir ingredients to combine; season.

Truffle Aioli:

2 t. truffle oil
3/4 cup mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste
2 T. water
Stir ingredients to combine.

Onion Ketchup:

1 cup ketchup
Onion Juice, to taste (from recipe for Rosemary/Onion Fries)
Stir ingredients together, tasting frequently, until desired onion flavor is achieved.



At Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, the mac and cheese is given a kick with chipotle powder tossed into the breadcrumb topping.

Mac & cheese

We've seen that classic comfort-food favorite dolled up before, but not like this. The approach of these three chefs takes a steakhouse standby and makes it signature.

At Newport Beach, Calif.-based Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, with 57 units across the country, the chipotle/cheddar macaroni and cheese is dominating side-dish sales.

"Running dishes like this mac and cheese brings more people into steakhouses," says chef/partner and regional chef Jason Carron. "Coming up with these also gives us chefs something fun to do."

He sautés leeks in butter, adds a roux (made with butter and flour), heavy cream, half-and-half, roasted garlic, smoked cheddar, cheddar, and salt and pepper. He tosses in cooked cavatappi, and tops it with panko breadcrumbs prepared with chipotle chili powder and corn oil. The pasta is then baked in the oven until brown.

Mac and cheese is decidedly grown-up at Stark's Steakhouse in Santa Rosa, Calif. Chef/owner Mark Stark serves a Cambozola macaroni and cheese, which

features a traditional béchamel spiked with Cambozola, fontina and cream cheese. The pasta is placed in gratin dishes, sprinkled with toasted breadcrumbs (leftover Caesar salad breadcrumbs), finished with Parmesan and baked in the oven until brown.

"The fontina adds that great stringiness you want in a mac and cheese, and the Cambozola adds flavor," says Stark. "The cream cheese gives it a nice tang and mouthfeel."

"My recipe for lobster mac and cheese was one of life's great mistakes," says Brett McKee, chef/owner of Oak Steakhouse in Charleston, S.C. He had made a lobster stock, but ran out of time for a dish he was preparing, so he added it to a béchamel, added cooked shell macaroni, lobster chunks poached in butter, three jumbo shrimp, fontina and Parmesan. He then spooned the mixture into a dish, and ran it under the salamander until browned.

"It's one of the best sellers on the menu," says McKee. So popular that he now runs it on the bar menu, too.

Vegetable sides . . . beyond sautéed spinach

Todd Mark Miller's sweet-corn pudding is a twist on cream of corn, a steakhouse classic. As corporate chef for Los Angeles-based The One Group, he stresses the importance of cooking with the seasons and surprising diners with exciting cuisine.

"You want to have items that are not at other restaurants," he says. "You want signature items, and I tell you, people come back here for our sweet-corn pudding."

He serves them at STK, the company's steakhouse concept with restaurants in New York and Los Angeles (and openings scheduled for Miami and Las Vegas). He cuts niblets off half the fresh corn called for in the recipe, and creams the rest by

"It's crazy how some of these side dishes, like the beets, sell better than the typical starchy fare."

—Brett McKee

running it through a mandolin twice. He steams half-and-half and adds cornmeal. While that thickens, he sautés the niblets in butter, then adds them to the cornmeal mixture and seasons with salt. On pickup, he adds more half-and-half, achieving the consistency of runny mashed potatoes.

"It's sinfully delicious, and so wrong, but you just have to have it," says Miller.

At Flemings, Carron offers a creamed corn gratinée with Parmesan and Gruyère. "It's got a little bit of a kick, and it's shareable," he says. "It's incredibly popular."

He sautés onion in butter, then adds a bit of half-and-half, white and black pepper, cayenne, kosher salt and paprika. He stirs in corn, sugar and the cheeses. He browns it in the broiler and garnishes with three fried jalapeño wheels.

Ledbetter dresses up Brussels sprouts at LarkCreekSteak. He serves beer-braised Brussels sprouts with caraway, thyme and Fat Tire ale. He covers the sprouts in beer, then adds a bit of butter, salt and pepper, toasted caraway seeds and fresh thyme. He brings them to a boil, then gently simmers them until almost done. He removes and cools the Brussels sprouts, reserving the liquid. On the pickup, he sautés them in olive oil and hits them with butter and the braising liquid until they're glazed.

"They're delicious, but it's more than that," says Ledbetter. "You've got to offer interesting things, and you've got to enjoy cooking them. If you don't, then we'd get

bored cooking the same thing, and people would get bored eating it all the time."

Stark, of Stark's Steakhouse, agrees. "Sides help you stand out, but the steaks are the draw," he says. "Changing up the sides menu give your line cooks something to work on."

One of his vegetable sides is DiCiccio broccoli with lemon marmalade. He blanches Broccolini, then sautés it with garlic, extra-virgin olive oil and a housemade lemon marmalade (Myer lemon, salt, sugar, olive oil). He adds red-chile flakes, and seasons it with salt and pepper.

"The marmalade gives the dish a nice, bright lemon flavor, and just brings up the dish to a new level," says Stark.

At Oak Steakhouse, McKee offers roasted beets with creamy mascarpone as one of his side-dish staples. "It goes really well with steaks, and just looks beautiful on the plate," he says.

He roasts golden and red beets until tender, then peels and dices them. He sautés them in butter with fresh sage and thyme, and seasons them with salt and pepper. He then tops the beets with soft mascarpone.

"It's crazy how some of these side dishes, like the beets, sell better than the typical starchy fare," says McKee. "I'm happy about that."

Katie Ayoub, an award-winning writer, is based in Keswick, Ontario, Canada. She is editor in chief of our sister publication, Sizzle.



OHAUS

EB and Valor™ 5000



Speed and Durability for Food Service Use

The OHAUS EB and Valor™ 5000 are rugged, multi-use scales for use in a wide variety of food service applications.

Ideally suited for food portioning, these scales combine lightning fast display updates, high precision load cells, spill resistant designs, and flexible cordless battery operation.

- **Displays only the weighing units you need: lbs, oz kg or g**
- **Includes Baker's Percentage software**
- **Bright display powered by an internal rechargeable battery or AC adapter (both included)**
- **Capacities up to 60lb with precision to 0.1g (based on model)**

www.ohaus.com

Call 1.800.672.7722, ext. 7021